



Romero Salvado, F. J. (2019). Spain and the First World War: The Logic of Neutrality. *War in History*, 26(1), 44-64.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0968344516688931>

Peer reviewed version

Link to published version (if available):  
[10.1177/0968344516688931](https://doi.org/10.1177/0968344516688931)

[Link to publication record in Explore Bristol Research](#)  
PDF-document

This is the author accepted manuscript (AAM). The final published version (version of record) is available online via Sage at <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0968344516688931>. Please refer to any applicable terms of use of the publisher.

## University of Bristol - Explore Bristol Research

### General rights

This document is made available in accordance with publisher policies. Please cite only the published version using the reference above. Full terms of use are available:  
<http://www.bristol.ac.uk/red/research-policy/pure/user-guides/ebr-terms/>

# Spain and World War I: The Logic of Neutrality

## Centenary of a Cataclysm

Metaphorically, darkness descended over Europe in the summer of 1914. The Great War was a cataclysm that resulted in eight and a half millions deaths, reshaped the map of the continent, and initiated a period of unprecedented socio-political radicalism described by Eric Hobsbawm as “an age of catastrophe”.<sup>1</sup> However, when focusing on the case of Spain, Manuel Espadas Burgos noted in 2000 that it was still one of the chapters in her recent history that most needed research.<sup>2</sup>

In fact, although some important works, whose chronology often transcended the framework of the Great War, had already been published,<sup>3</sup> it was not until 2002 that the first monographic study of the subject in all its complexity and context appeared.<sup>4</sup> Ever since, this relative dearth of literature has been gradually corrected. Moreover, several academic congresses have taken place and new and excellent works have appeared with occasion of the centenary. Within this new bibliography, the field of international relations and diplomacy stands out. We now have acquired a very accurate idea of the activities of the belligerent nations in

---

<sup>1</sup> Eric HOBSBAWM: *Age of Extremes. The Short Twentieth Century, 1914-91*, London, Penguin, 1994, pp. 6-7.

<sup>2</sup> Manuel ESPADAS BURGOS: “España y la Primera Guerra Mundial”, Javier TUSELL, Juan AVILÉS, and Rosa PARDO (coords.): *La política exterior de España en el siglo XX*, Madrid, Biblioteca New, 2000, p. 97. The same conclusion is reached in Maximiliano FUENTES CODERA: “Presentación” (*La Gran Guerra de los Intelectuales*), *Ayer*, 91 (2013), pp. 21-23; and Carolina GARCÍA SANZ: “La Gran Guerra en su centenario”, *Ayer*, 95 (2014), pp. 252-253.

<sup>3</sup> For instance, Juan Antonio LACOMBA: *La crisis española de 1917*, Málaga, Ciencia Nueva, 1970; Fernando DÍAZ PLAJA, *Francófilos y Germanófilos*, Barcelona, Dopesa, 1973; Gerald MEAKER: *The Revolutionary Left in Spain, 1914-23*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1974 and, “A Civil War of Words”, Hans A. SCHMITT (ed.): *Neutral Europe between War and Revolution, 1917-1923*, Charlottesville, University of Virginia Press, 1988; Carlos FORCADELL: *Parlamentarismo y bolchevización. El movimiento obrero español, 1914-1918*, Barcelona, Crítica, 1978; Carolyn P. BOYD: *Praetorian Politics in Liberal Spain*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1979; Ron M. CARDEN: *German Policy Toward Neutral Spain, 1914-18*, New York, Garland, 1987.

<sup>4</sup> Francisco J. ROMERO SALVADÓ: *España 1914-18, Entre la Guerra y la revolución*, Barcelona, Crítica, 2002 (translated from *Spain 1914-18: Between the War and the Revolution*, London, Routledge, 1999). Its theses have been updated in posterior works: “Fatal Neutrality: Pragmatism or Capitulation? Spain's Foreign Policy during the Great War”, *European History Quarterly*, 33 (2003); “The Great War and the Crisis of Liberalism in Spain, 1916-1917”, *The Historical Journal*, 46 (2003); *The Foundations of Civil War. Revolution, Social Conflict and Reaction in Spain*, London, Routledge, 2008; and with Angel SMITH (eds.): *The Agony of Spanish Liberalism. From Revolution to Dictatorship, 1913-1923*, Palgrave, Basingstoke, 2010.

Spain, their control and manipulation of the press, their spy networks, the activities of their submarines, etc.<sup>5</sup>

This article analyses how Spain's decision to remain officially neutral during the war should be seen as fundamentally logical for two reasons. On the one hand, Spain's socio-economic and military reality painted a picture of a country ill prepared to engage in the conflict. On the other hand, political leaders had little room to manoeuvre, as Spain was practically surrounded by the Allies and yet most of the ruling institutions (armed forces, Church, and court) were more or less openly favourable to the Central Powers. However, Spain's neutrality, far from being a static concept, underwent different phases and was even in some moments apparently (though never genuinely) at risk. In the process, the nature of Spain's neutrality evolved over the course of the war in response to a change in belligerent nations' attitudes from one of initial respect and understanding to one of increasing contempt.

Fernando García Sanz has suggested that neutrality was a mere fiction: "Spain was neither allowed nor wanted to be neutral".<sup>6</sup> It is true that the country could not remain isolated from the war's devastating consequences. Spain became a minor theatre of operations and, in turn, suffered a significant erosion of sovereignty, freedom of trade, and control over coasts and territorial waters. At the same time, the ruling liberal order underwent a crisis of hegemony that represented the regional

---

<sup>5</sup> The state of the question can be found in Maximiliano FUENTES CODERA and CAROLINA GARCÍA SANZ: "España and la Gran Guerra: un análisis historiográfico a la luz del centenario", *Índice Histórico Español*, 128 (2015), pp. 97-130. A summary of publications since 2002 should include: Juan PANDO: *Un rey para la esperanza: La España humanitaria de Alfonso XIII en la Gran Guerra*, Madrid, Temas de hoy, 2002; Javier PONCE MARRERO: *Canarias en la Gran Guerra, 1914-1918*, Tenerife, Cabildo de Gran Canaria, 2006, and "Propaganda and Politics: Germany and Spanish Public Opinion in World War I", Troy R.E. PADDOCK (ed.): *World War I and Propaganda*, Leiden-Boston, Brill, 2014; Carolina GARCÍA SANZ: *La Primera Guerra Mundial en el Estrecho de Gibraltar. Economía, política y relaciones internacionales*, Madrid, CSIC, 2012; Miguel Ángel MARTORELL: "No fue aquello solamente una guerra, fue una revolución: España y la Primera Guerra Mundial", *Historia y Política*, 26 (2011); Rosa PARDO: "España ante el conflicto bélico de 1914-1918: ¿Una espléndida neutralidad?", Salvador FORNER (ed.): *Coyuntura Internacional y Política Española*, Madrid, Biblioteca New, 2010; Eduardo GONZÁLEZ CALLEJA and Paul AUBERT: *Nidos de espías. España, Francia y la I Guerra Mundial*, Madrid, Alianza Editorial, 2014; Fernando GARCÍA SANZ: *España en la Gran Guerra. Espías, diplomáticos y traficantes*, Madrid, Galaxia Gutenberg, 2014; Maximiliano FUENTES CODERA: *España en la Primera Guerra Mundial: una movilización cultural*, Madrid, Akal, 2014; Francisco MORENTE and Javier RODRIGO (eds.): *Tierras de nadie. La Primera Guerra Mundial y sus consecuencias*, Granada, Comares, 2014.

<sup>6</sup> Fernando GARCÍA SANZ: *España...*, pp. 13, 32.

version of the upheaval that engulfed Europe during the interwar years. Nevertheless, at a formal level and despite internal tensions and foreign provocations, neutrality endured until the end of the war, and Spain was consequently spared from the human and material devastation that belligerence would have entailed.

## Official Neutrality

On 7 August 1914, the state's official bulletin published a royal decree stating Spain's strict neutrality in the unfolding continental conflict. The correspondence between the then prime minister, Eduardo Dato, and his former leader and now head of a dissident faction of the Conservative Party, Antonio Maura, clarified the logic behind the decision: lack of material resources, absence of treaties with the belligerent powers,<sup>7</sup> and the hope to one day preside over a mediation process. Dato even emphasized that only an ultimatum or flagrant aggression could prompt Spain to abandon its position of neutrality.<sup>8</sup>

As Manuel Azaña pointed out in 1917, neutrality was not a policy freely chosen but imposed by reality.<sup>9</sup> It simply reflected the economic weakness, military impotence and, the marginal status of Spain in Europe. Any remaining pretension of still being a great power had vanished after the colonial trauma of 1898 and the glaring failures of a new colonial adventure in Morocco. In fact, most of the military budget was used to pay the salaries of a chronically overstaffed officer corps. The consequence was the existence of an army outdated in terms of modernization and infrastructure in comparison to its neighbouring rivals.<sup>10</sup> Ironically, its limited military prowess

---

<sup>7</sup> The Algeciras Conference (January-April 1906) and the Cartagena Accords (April-May 1907) confirmed Spanish influence over a coastal strip of land in Northern Morocco. Even though Spain was firmly placed within the Anglo-French orbit, the accords were limited to the Western Mediterranean. Enrique ROSAS LEDEZMA: "Las declaraciones de Cartagena (1907): significación en la política exterior de España y repercusiones internacionales", *Cuadernos de Historia moderna and contemporánea*, 2 (1981), pp. 213-230.

<sup>8</sup> Gabriel MAURA and Melchor FERNÁNDEZ ALMAGRO: *Por qué cayó Alfonso XIII*, Madrid, Ambos Mundos, 1948, pp. 472-473; Maura to Dato (4, 29 August 1914), Real Academia de la Historia (RAH), *Eduardo Dato's Papers* (AED), prime ministers, nos. 328-329.

<sup>9</sup> Manuel AZAÑA: *Los motivos de la Germanofilia*, Madrid, Helénica, 1917, p. 18.

<sup>10</sup> In 1900, there were 499 generals, 578 colonels and over 23,000 officers for some 80,000 troops in the Spanish armed forces (six times more officers than in France which had a standing army of 180,000 soldiers). Gabriel CARDONA: *El poder militar en la España contemporánea hasta la guerra civil*, Madrid: Siglo XXI, 1983, pp. 10-12.

eliminated the danger of facing pressures to enter the war. In a detailed study, the British military attaché Jocelyn Grant concluded that the state of the Spanish army, whose capacity he compared to that of Romania, was so pitiful that it did not constitute a threat to anyone with the possible exception of Portugal.<sup>11</sup>

When hostilities broke out, neutrality enjoyed a vast consensus across the political spectrum. Apart from the anticipated discrepancies (the ultra-clerical Carlists supported Germany and some republicans such as Alejandro Lerroux sided with the Allies and, in the process, landed the Spanish government in some embarrassing situations),<sup>12</sup> the distant powder-barrel of the Balkans was an alien affair to the general interests of the country. From socialists to Catalan regionalists expressed their opposition to any type of intervention.<sup>13</sup> The British Ambassador, Arthur Hardinge, recognized that neutrality was Spain's most logical stance.<sup>14</sup>

Nevertheless, neutrality did not isolate Spain from the war theatre. Due to its role as supplier of the belligerents and their many abandoned markets, the country's mining concerns and industrial sectors (textile, metallurgy, chemistry, consumer goods, etc.), commercial enterprises and financial ventures, experienced a spectacular boom.<sup>15</sup> According to Josep Maria de Sagarra, Barcelona enjoyed unprecedented profitable times as a result of war.<sup>16</sup> Industrial barons, speculators, financial tycoons and fleet owners amassed fortunes often later squandered in gambling, leisure, jewellery, property, etc.<sup>17</sup> However, as Raymond Carr suggested, the sudden prosperity contributed to expose the faults in its social structure.<sup>18</sup> The

---

<sup>11</sup> Dispatch of Jocelyne Grant (9 January 1917), National Archives (NA), *Foreign Office Papers* (FO) 371, 3030/11,488.

<sup>12</sup> Hardinge to Grey on the difficult circumstances created by the noisy support of Lerroux's Radical Party (3 November 1914), FO 371, 2106/69,755; Hardinge informs Grey of Dato's anger after being informed that Lerroux had demanded £120,000 to the British Embassy in order to distribute bribes amongst the ministers (1 February 1915), FO 371, 2469/15,366. David Martínez Fiol: 'Lerrouxistas en pie de guerra', *Historia* 16, 174 (1990), pp. 24-26.

<sup>13</sup> The socialist stance is in Fundación Pablo Iglesias, *Archivo Amaro del Rosal, Historia de la UGT*, August 1914, and *El Socialista*, 4 August 1914. For Catalan regionalism see *La Veu de Catalunya*, 19 August 1914. On the initial consensus see Francisco J. ROMERO SALVADÓ: *España...*, pp. 7-8.

<sup>14</sup> Hardinge to Grey (9 November 1914), FO 371, 2104/72,570.

<sup>15</sup> José Luis GARCÍA DELGADO: *La modernización económica en la España de Alfonso XIII*, Madrid, Espasa, 2002, pp. 106-136.

<sup>16</sup> Josep Maria DE SAGARRA: *Memorias*, Noguer, Barcelona, 1957, p. 572.

<sup>17</sup> Pedro GUAL: *Memorias de un industrial de nuestro tiempo*, Barcelona, Sociedad General, 1923, pp. 118-121.

<sup>18</sup> Raymond CARR: *España, 1808-1975*, Oxford, OUP, 1982, p. 497.

lethal combination of opulence and misery drastically altered the traditional fabric of society.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, most of the population suffered a dramatic worsening of its living standards and a significant loss of purchasing power due to galloping inflation and shortages of staple products. Also, the demographic blast produced by the avalanche of cheap labour from the poorer southern rural areas searching for work in the booming industrial centres, especially Barcelona, brought about the resulting sequels of squalor, overcrowding and misery.<sup>20</sup>

Although the socio-economic consequences of the war are well-known, its cultural impact has received much less scholarly attention.<sup>21</sup> Authors differ as to whether it remained confined to the urban elites or whether it permeated ample sectors of society.<sup>22</sup> Witnesses of the events revealed how discussions around neutrality generated family divisions, destroyed long-lasting friendships and caused quarrels in the workplace.<sup>23</sup> The philias and phobias mirrored at a national scale the transcendental values associated with the warring sides.<sup>24</sup> According to Gerald Meaker, the ideological debate acquired the character of a dialectical civil war between two opposite views on the future of Spain. In general, social groups and institutions marked by their conservatism (landowners, army officers, court, Church) supported the Central Powers since they appeared to symbolize the fundamental principles that they wanted to see consolidated in Spain, namely, tradition, authority, and social hierarchy. Within the pro-German camp two groups lived side by side: those who admired the industrial and military might of Germany and those who, above all, wanted to see Britain and France humiliated for a number of historical affronts (War of Independence, Gibraltar). By contrast, the liberal professions, intellectuals, republicans and socialists identified themselves with the Allies, in particular France, the model of a secular and democratic nation that they

---

<sup>19</sup> Francisco J. ROMERO SALVADÓ: *Foundations...*, pp. 26-28.

<sup>20</sup> Chris EALHAM: *Class, Culture and Conflict in Barcelona, 1898-1937*, London, Routledge, 2005, pp. 6-9;

<sup>21</sup> Maximiliano FUENTES CODERA, *España...*, p. 19.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35, suggests that its impact affected all social levels. On the contrary, Gerald MEAKER ("A Civil...", p. 5) claims that the masses, unlike the elites, did not understand the war and regarded with indifference the ideological debate. Fernando GARCÍA SANZ (*España...*, p. 45) also concluded that it only affected minority sectors.

<sup>23</sup> Josep Maria DE SAGARRA, *Memorias...* p. 553; Pedro GUAL: *Memorias...*, pp. 102-103.

<sup>24</sup> Manuel ESPADAS BURGOS: "España...", p. 107.

wished to emulate.<sup>25</sup> Nevertheless, as Fuentes Codera suggests, there were numerous contradictions. The Carlist pretender to the throne (Don Jaime) was a staunch supporter of the Allied cause. The intellectuals, including conservatives such as Álvaro Alcalá Galiano, were predominantly favourable to the Allies, in the hope that European influence could extract Spain from its decadence. However, there was also a significant minority of progressive authors who sided with Germany, including Jacinto Benavente, who always stressed the efficiency of that country's state socialism and, Pío Baroja, who paradoxically believed that a German victory was the best means to destroy Spanish clericalism.<sup>26</sup>

As the war dragged on, neutrality began to acquire different connotations.<sup>27</sup> Two other southern European countries, Portugal and Italy, which had remained neutral at the outbreak of the war, ultimately decided to join the conflict on the side of the western democracies. Italy, as a member of the Triple Alliance with Germany and Austro-Hungary, was pledged to stay at least neutral if one her allies declared war on another country. However, after conducting secret negotiations with the Allies, behind the back of its parliament and public opinion, the government decided to switch sides and enter the war mostly for strategic and opportunist reasons: the secret treaty of London (26 April 1915) stipulated that after victory Italy was to receive all the Dalmatian coast and the so-called *terra irredenta* or those areas under Austrian control mostly inhabited by Italians (Trieste, Tirol and Trentino). Portugal was not part of the two opposite blocs and thus remained neutral in the summer of 1914. Nevertheless, it enjoyed a long-standing alliance with Great Britain. Growing skirmishes between German and Portuguese colonial troops in southwestern Africa, German naval warfare against neutral shipping and British prompting finally in February 1916 led the Portuguese government to seize the Central Powers' ships that

---

<sup>25</sup> Gerald MEAKER: "A Civil...", pp. 1-37; Fernando DÍAZ PLAJA: *Francófilos...*, pp. 24-25; Jesús LONGARES ALONSO: "Germanófilos y aliadófilos españoles en la Primera Guerra Mundial", *Tiempo de Historia*, 21 (1976); pp. 42-45; Secret Reports (2 February and 17 April 1916), FO 371, 2471/20,576 y 73,963.

<sup>26</sup> See works by Maximiliano FUENTES CODERA: *España...*, pp. 34, 100-102; and, "Germanófilos y neutralistas: proyectos tradicionalistas y regeneracionistas para España (1914-1918)", *Ayer*, 91 (2013), pp. 63-92; Javier VARELA, "Los intelectuales españoles ante la Gran Guerra", *Claves de razón práctica*, 88 (1998), pp. 27-37.

<sup>27</sup> Maximiliano FUENTES CODERA: *España...*, p. 47.

had sought refuge in Portuguese causing an automatic declaration of war by Germany. The entry in the struggle of Italy and Portugal (May 1915 and March 1916 respectively) left the Spanish coasts and borders literally surrounded by the Allies. Consequently, those favourable to the cause of the Entente began to demand a departure from strict neutrality, a greater compromise with the western powers, or, in some cases, the rupture of relations with the Central Powers. The pro-German sectors, aware of the military suicide that joining the war on the side of Germany would entail, became the most ardent defenders of strict neutrality which they described as defending national independence.

### **Neutrality under Question**

The Dato cabinet was able to successfully maintain a strict neutrality. His fall was therefore regretted by both warring camps. In fact, Hardinge even feared that the arrival of a new government, more openly favourable to the Allies but whose ability to act would be precluded by the political reality, could be a source of future problems.<sup>28</sup> This would be the case after the return to office in December 1915 of Count Romanones, the leader of the other dynastic party (the Liberals), and the great exception within a governing class determined to abide by neutrality at any cost.

A classic stereotype of the ruling politician in Restoration Spain, Romanones, whose biography has been clinically studied by Javier Moreno Luzón,<sup>29</sup> surprised everybody, on 19 August 1914, when his mouthpiece, *El Diario Universal*, published an article entitled “*Neutralidades que matan*” (Fatal Neutralities) that criticized the existing strict neutrality. Without openly advocating intervention, he claimed that for economic and geopolitical reasons Spain should stand clearly in the orbit of the Allies, her natural partners or otherwise the country would be marginalized in the future peace conference.<sup>30</sup> This initiative challenged the official consensus.<sup>31</sup> Aware of the outrage he had unleashed, the ever-cunning Romanones declared his total identification with the government and immediately produced a new article to

---

<sup>28</sup> Hardinge to Grey (10 December 1915), FO 371, 2469/188,410.

<sup>29</sup> Javier MORENO LUZÓN: *Romanones. Caciquismo y política liberal*, Madrid, Alianza, 1998.

<sup>30</sup> According to ROMANONES (*Notas de una vida*, Madrid, Marcial Pons, 1999, p. 379), he wrote his article while enjoying his favourite pastime shooting partridges.

<sup>31</sup> Francisco J. ROMERO SALVADÓ: “Fatal...”, p. 295.



“rectify misunderstandings”: neutrality should not amount to indifference but anyone who sheltered any belligerent purpose had simply lost his mind.<sup>32</sup>

During Romanones’ period in office, the mobilization of three key social sectors accelerated the crisis of hegemony of the regime. During the second half of 1916, the campaign by national industrial and commercial interests led by the Lliga Regionalista de Catalunya (Lliga) destroyed the grandiose economic plans of Finance minister, Santiago Alba, since these plans were to be mainly sustained through an extraordinary tax on war profits. The gravity of the social crisis made possible a historic labour pact in July between the two main trade unions – the socialist *Unión General de Trabajadores* (UGT) and the anarcho-syndicalist *Confederación Nacional del Trabajo* (CNT). Finally, army officers, up to the rank of colonel, began to establish a sort of military trade union, *Juntas Militares de Defensa*, with the objective of protecting the collective interests of the corps. Simultaneously, the neutrality debate entered a critical phase.<sup>33</sup>

Despite several public declarations of adherence to the status quo,<sup>34</sup> Romanones attempted surreptitiously to abandon strict neutrality. Practically in control of Foreign Affairs, which was run by his friend Amalio Gimeno, he avoided parliamentary scrutiny and relied, as his private documents reveal, on the secret channels of diplomacy through ambassadors close to his views: Paris (Fernando León y Castillo), London (Alfonso Merry del Val), the Vatican (Fermín Calbetón), and Rome (Marquis of Villaurrutia). They were instructed to confirm the sympathy of the Spanish government for the Entente and, in turn, negotiate territorial concessions in order to facilitate the task of altering the existing neutrality. The main objective was Tangier, then under international statute, which, according to Romanones was “our main concern... and the vital condition to secure control of our Protectorate in Morocco”.<sup>35</sup> However, his plans collided with reality.

---

<sup>32</sup> “The Neutrality Question”, *El Imparcial*, 4 September 1914.

<sup>33</sup> An analysis of this period can be found in Francisco J. ROMERO SALVADÓ: “The Great War...”, pp. 893-914.

<sup>34</sup> See his declarations in parliament (10 May, 6 June, 13 October, 4 November 1916).

<sup>35</sup> Romanones to León y Castillo (25 January, 23 February, 23 March, 30 June 1916), and to Merry del Val (24 January 1916), RAH, *Count Romanones’ Papers* (ACR), II I A.

To his chagrin, León y Castillo and Merry del Val agreed that Spain was perceived in the western chancelleries as a country dominated by clerical and pro-German institutions whereas the presence of a friendly administration was only a temporary affair. Furthermore, they did not see any reason to offer concessions in exchange for mere displays of rhetorical friendship.<sup>36</sup> Additionally, the entry of Italy and Portugal in the war had greatly diminished Spain's strategic value, since Spain was already well-anchored in their geopolitical and economic orbit. Consequently, they were only prepared to listen to concrete proposals.<sup>37</sup> In fact, Spain, whose economic resources were effectively mobilized at the service of the Entente, became *de facto* "a neutral ally". Between the spring of 1917 and June 1918, several commercial treaties were signed with Great Britain, France and the United States. Spain secured crucial supplies of coal and oil and exported essential products for the Allied war effort: minerals, textiles, food-stuffs, and manufactured goods.<sup>38</sup> Nevertheless, given the geographic situation and the enormity of its wartime profits, it is impossible to ignore the significance of Germany's ability to perpetuate Spain's neutral stance and therefore the success of her active interference in Spanish affairs.

From 1916, Spain became a real theatre of operations. García Sanz suggests that Spain had the dubious honour of being the first place where a large-scale intelligence war took place.<sup>39</sup> Updating Carden's pioneering work on Germany's activities in Spain during the Great War, Rosenbusch's research confirms their extraordinary scope.<sup>40</sup> Not only were Germany's subversive operations far vaster than those of its enemies but also the impunity with which they were carried out produced constant complaints from the Entente whose own initiatives were initially hampered

---

<sup>36</sup> León y Castillo to Romanones (5 February, 22 April, 8 May 1916), ACR, II I A; Merry del Val to Romanones, ACR, 42/3 (1 December 1916); Merry del Val to Alfonso XIII (25 August 1916), Archivo General del Palacio Real, *Sección Reinado de Alfonso XIII* (AGPR), 16,231/2.

<sup>37</sup> Grey to Hardinge (31 March 1916), FO 371, 2711/58,754. Conversations between Grey and Cambon (28 October, 11 November 1916), FO 371, 2412/160,862 and 166,839.

<sup>38</sup> Jean-Marc DELAUNAY: "España trabajó por la victoria", *Historia* 16, 63 (1981), pp. 19-20; José Antonio MONTERO JIMÉNEZ: "Diplomacia económica y balanza de pagos. Los pactos hispano-estadounidenses de 1918", *Revista de Historia Económica*, 2 (2008), pp. 254-259. On "neutral ally", see Javier PONCE MARRERO: *Canarias...*, p. 92.

<sup>39</sup> Fernando GARCÍA SANZ: *España...*, p. 70.

<sup>40</sup> Anne ROSENBUSCH: *Spanish-German Relations during the First World War*, Doctoral Thesis, National University of Ireland Maynooth (2014), pp. 197-256.

by a lack of coordination. Eventually, the Allies established efficient counter-espionage networks, resourceful coastal vigilance services and implemented all sort of measures, including veiled military threats, to force the Spanish authorities to act.<sup>41</sup>

The objective of the Central Powers was to secure that Spain's neutral status remained unchanged and, to protect their various interests (economic investments and nearly 100 ships – 70 German and 25 Austrian – that had sought refuge in Spanish harbours at the start of the war)<sup>42</sup> while harming those of the Allies. In order to achieve its purposes, Germany practiced the strategy of the carrot and the stick.

The carrot consisted of constant flattery together with territorial promises to Spain which depending on the moment included Gibraltar, Portugal and even part of the French North African Empire.<sup>43</sup> Germany had ample room to manoeuvre. Unlike the Italian case, a country which coveted territory that was then part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Germany could promise territories to Spain that did not belong to her or her allies. Given its geographic situation, Spain could not seriously be tempted to enter the war on the side of Germany, however Berlin could portray itself as a generous friend and embarrass Allied diplomats, who were clearly thrown off balance when either Spanish politicians or the king, reacting to Germany's territorial blandishments, approached them with demands that they should match these offers. The Allies were then faced with the dilemma of either rejecting any territorial re-settlement, thereby confirming the idea of being the historic enemies of Spain, or surrendering valuable territory merely to secure Spanish gratitude.<sup>44</sup>

As far as the stick goes, under the military attaché (Major Arnold von Kalle), and the naval attaché (Captain Hans von Krohn), Germany carried out a vast intelligence campaign. Their spy networks enrolled the services of all kinds of

---

<sup>41</sup> Two crucial books on this subject are Eduardo GONZÁLEZ CALLEJA and Paul AUBERT: *Nidos...*, and Fernando GARCÍA SANZ: *España...*

<sup>42</sup> List of German and Austrian ships in Spanish ports can be seen in ACR, 10/12.

<sup>43</sup> According to ROMANONES (*Notas...*, pp. 385-386), the German ambassador promised Dato, Tangiers, Gibraltar, and Portugal in exchange for Spanish aid. Examples of other offers can be found in Ron M. CARDEN, *German...*, pp. 96-99. The Austrian ambassador, Prince Karl von Fürstenberg, confirmed to Alfonso XIII the support of his country for a Spanish Tangier (18 April 1915), AGPR, 15,252/9. See also, secret reports (5 February 1915, 17 March 1916), FO 371, 2470/4,004 y 2761/31,988.

<sup>44</sup> The tensions sowed by German offers can be seen in "Conversation of Alfonso XIII with French diplomats" (15 March 1915), FO 371, 2470/29,500; "Conversations of Alfonso XIII with Russian Ambassador" (25 May 1916), FO 371, 2412/65.976.

characters (prostitutes, waiters, dancers, police agents, anarchists, etc.), especially in the main urban centres, the coasts, the borders, and the islands in order to sabotage the production of goods destined for the Allies.<sup>45</sup> They informed on the sea routes and departures of merchant vessels so that these could be intercepted by submarines. On 17 August 1915, *El Isidoro* was the first Spanish ship sunk. From the second half of 1916, submarine activities in Spanish waters increased significantly, particularly on the Mediterranean coast and around the Canary Islands.<sup>46</sup> German agents also fostered the insurrection in French Morocco, often acting from the Spanish zone with the benevolence, if not the complicity, of the Spanish colonial authorities.<sup>47</sup> Such complicity acquired scandalous dimensions in Equatorial Guinea where the authorities openly fraternized with interned German officers, after their withdrawal from Cameroon, who remained armed and were actively planning military operations. Only after strong pressure was exerted, including the dispatch of French cruisers, were they deported to the mainland.<sup>48</sup>

German efforts also preceded and had a greater impact than those of the Allies in the vital matter of controlling the press. The rising costs due to the shortage of paper facilitated the purchase of newspapers. In total, some 500 local and national publications, from different ideological leanings (conservative, republican and anarchist) fell under their influence. Consequently, any challenge to strict neutrality was described as treason by the patriotic right-wing press or as an attempt to drag the proletariat into an imperialist war by the left.<sup>49</sup>

---

<sup>45</sup> List of German subversive activities, ACR, 63/46. Secret reports (2 February 1916, 6 July 1918), FO 371, 2760/20,756, and FO 371, 372/118.836. Anarchist collusion with German intelligence needs much more research. It was recognized by Ángel PESTAÑA: *Lo que aprendí en la vida*, Murcia, Zero, 1971, Vol. 1, pp. 66-68; Albert PÉREZ BARÓ: *Els felicos anys vint. Memòries d'un militant obrer, 1918-26*, Palma de Mallorca, Moll, 1984, pp. 11-12; and Emili SALUT: *Vivers de revolucionaris. Apunts històrics del districte cinqué*, Barcelona, Catalonia, 1938, p. 149.

<sup>46</sup> Jesús PEREA RUIZ: "Guerra submarina en España", *Espacio, Tiempo y Forma*, Serie V, 16 (2004), pp. 193-229; and ANON.: *Algunos datos sobre la guerra submarina*, Madrid, Tipografía de los hijos de Tello, 1918, pp. 10-47. For the Canary Islands, see Javier PONCE MARRERO: *Canarias...*, pp. 217-287.

<sup>47</sup> Paris (1916-1917), Archivo General de la Administración, *Asuntos Exteriores*, 95, 5959-5960; ACR, 40/9 (10).

<sup>48</sup> Grey to Hardinge (14 November 1916, 17 February 1917), and reports from the Intelligence Service (23 December 1916), FO 371, 2762/229,041, and FO 371, 46,070/260,662.

<sup>49</sup> Report on German control of the Spanish press (2 February 1919), Archivo Histórico Nacional, *Serie Gobernación*, 48A/15. Secret Report (October 1917), FO 395, 117/23,798. The crucial role of the press in securing Spain's neutrality can be seen in Ron M. CARDEN: *German...*, p. 56; Anne ROSENBUSCH,

Rosenbusch notes that an all-out campaign to topple Romanones, led by the German ambassador, Prince Max von Ratibor, began in September 1916 and it was formally supported by Berlin in December.<sup>50</sup> The key moment came when the Spanish prime minister rejected the German peace offer of 12 December 1916,<sup>51</sup> sided with the Allies and even criticized Germany's contempt for international rules with its submarine activities.<sup>52</sup> The pro-German press justified the use of its submarines as a necessary means to secure German survival while accusing Romanones of seeking to push Spain into the war due to his vast economic interests; the very same economic interests that triggered the inflation and shortages that were devastating the country.<sup>53</sup> In early January 1917, *El País* revealed that French intelligence services had intercepted cables from Ratibor asking Berlin for more funds to overthrow the Spanish government.<sup>54</sup>

The duel between Romanones and Germany only permitted two possible outcomes: the rupture of diplomatic relations or the prime minister's fall.<sup>55</sup> On 16 February, a suspicious individual, who turned out to be a German sailor, was arrested in Cartagena with two suitcases full of explosives, fuses, and propaganda. Romanones wrote to the Spanish ambassador in Berlin, Luis Polo de Bernabé, complaining that Germany did not respect neutrality. One of her sailors had been caught with enough dynamite to blow up all the fleets of the world and all Spanish factories.<sup>56</sup> Following Germany's announcement of the intensification of her submarine campaign, from 1 February 1917, Romanones believed in emulating the response given by hitherto neutral countries such as the United States and some Latin American republics.<sup>57</sup>

---

*Spanish-German...*, pp. 69-103. A thorough analysis of the subject is in Eduardo GONZÁLEZ CALLEJA and Paul AUBERT: *Nidos...*, pp. 229-265; and Javier PONCE MARRERO: "Propaganda...", pp. 293-321.

<sup>50</sup> Anne ROSENBUSCH, *Spanish-German...*, pp. 162-163.

<sup>51</sup> The German peace offer overlooked the fate of the occupied territories and was accompanied by apocalyptic threats in case the enemy decided to continue the war.

<sup>52</sup> "German Submarines in Our Conflict", *El Liberal*, 29 December 1916. The Allies' stance is in León y Castillo to Romanones (26 December 1917); Merry del Val to Romanones (28 December 1917), ACR, 16/8 and 11.

<sup>53</sup> Javier MORENO LUZÓN: *Romanones...*, p. 330.

<sup>54</sup> "Foreign Interference and National Dignity", *El País*, 9 January 1917. José Luis MARTÍNEZ SANZ: "El enfrentamiento Romanones-Ratibor", *Hispania*, 154 (1983), pp. 414-416.

<sup>55</sup> Francisco J. ROMERO SALVADÓ: "A Fatal...", pp. 298-305.

<sup>56</sup> Romanones to Polo (28 February 1917), ACR, II I A.

<sup>57</sup> The United States broke relations with Germany on 3 February 1917 and entered the war on 6 April. This example was followed by other Latin American countries such as Peru, Bolivia and Brazil.

However, aware of the daunting opposition from ruling circles, he instructed León y Castillo to start negotiations with the French authorities while awaiting the right moment to act. Nevertheless, he stressed that there was no backtracking since the maintenance of neutrality meant that Spain would remain a marginal country in the post-war world.<sup>58</sup>

León y Castillo proposed formally, for the first time, the rupture of relations with Germany, to place all the material resources and ports at the disposal of the Allies, to increase war production, and to seize all the ships and properties of the Central Powers in Spain. In return, his government wanted to open negotiations over the status of Gibraltar, Tangier and Portugal. At a moment in which the front was stalled and casualties kept mounting, the proposal was not without attraction for France since Spanish involvement portended an end to German activities in Morocco, free access to Spanish harbours and potentially hundreds of thousands of fresh troops. France appeared prepared to find an arrangement in Morocco but postponed its conclusion to the end of the war and left the questions of Gibraltar and Portugal in British hands.<sup>59</sup>

The British war cabinet regarded the Spanish offer as a mixed blessing. The Admiralty and the General Staff were well aware of the deplorable state of their Spanish counterparts but believed that Spain could make an important contribution in terms of manpower and enormous mineral resources. The Foreign Office considered the potential positive impact on the Catholic world but feared her demands could outweigh the advantages. Concerning Portugal, a future deal binding that country to Spain was not considered detrimental since Portuguese misgovernment was regarded as a persistent source of anxiety. Nevertheless, it was also noted that nothing could be done at the present while Portugal was an ally in the war otherwise Britain could be pilloried in the eyes of the world. As regards to Gibraltar, an interdepartmental committee, under the chairmanship of Lord Curzon, with naval, military and diplomatic representatives, was appointed in early April 1917 to report on its possible exchange for the Spanish enclave of Ceuta. Tellingly about British diplomacy, the most

---

<sup>58</sup> Romanones to León y Castillo (3, 6 February 1917), ACR, II I A; Romanones to Calbetón (6 February 1917), ACR, 8/14; Calbetón to Romanones (17 February 1917), ACR, 39/4.

<sup>59</sup> León y Castillo to Romanones (10 February 1917), ACR, II I A; National Archives, *Cabinet Papers* (CAB), 23/2 (91), (8 March 1917).

troublesome issue was Tangier. Spain was perceived as quite incapable of governing the city efficiently, due to widespread corruption and glaring incompetence to hold onto its territories in North Africa. The Foreign Office feared that, if Tangier was to become Spanish, one day France could use the pretext of faltering Spanish power in the area to seize that city and even Spanish Morocco, which would nullify all the elaborate precautions taken by Britain in the past to exclude her present ally, France, from the northern coast of Morocco. The War Cabinet finally approved Spain's alignment with the Entente and, although stressing that at this moment no territorial promises should be made, it instructed its diplomatic staff in Madrid to come up with suggestions. The Embassy Secretary, John C.T. Vaughan, proposed an offer that would extend Spanish Guinea northwards and restore Spanish sovereignty in the Caroline Islands.<sup>60</sup>

On 5 April 1917, the sinking of the steamer *San Fulgencio* was the decisive moment that persuaded Romanones to act. Germany had already destroyed over 30 Spanish vessels,<sup>61</sup> but this new attack was perceived as outrageous. The *San Fulgencio* had been torpedoed while heading towards Spanish waters with a vital cargo of coal after having travelled to Newcastle with a German safe-conduct. Urged by León y Castillo to take a decisive step,<sup>62</sup> Romanones replied:

"The culminant moment has arrived. The sinking of the *San Fulgencio* has been the final straw... The route I will take is already determined in the direction that you have known for a long time..."<sup>63</sup>

Romanones informed the French ambassador, Léon Geoffray, that the recent entry of the United States and several Latin American republics into the war had changed the situation. If Spain did not react now, her prestige would be sunk to the level of minor powers such as Holland.<sup>64</sup> However, on 19 April he resigned prompting celebrations in pro-German quarters. To add insult to injury, one of Germany's most vociferous

---

<sup>60</sup> Conclusions of the War Cabinet (14 March 1917), NA, Cabinet Papers, 24/7; Foreign Office Report, (12 April 1917), FO 371, 3035/75,549; Dispatches between the war cabinet and Vaughan, (12-14 April 1917), FO 371, 3033/77,074, 76,696 and 77,736.

<sup>61</sup> List of Spanish ships sunk until April 1917, ACR, 63/46.

<sup>62</sup> León y Castillo to Romanones (14 April 1917), ACR, II I A.

<sup>63</sup> Romanones to León y Castillo (14 April 1917), ACR, II I A.

<sup>64</sup> Vaughan to Balfour (12-13 April 1917), FO 371, 3035/75,548 and 76,696.

mouthpieces, *La Acción*, depicted Romanones with his heart pierced by a sword named neutrality in a cartoon sarcastically titled "Fatal Neutralities".<sup>65</sup>

### Alfonso XIII's Neutrality

In reality, Spain's neutrality was never at risk. Romanones did not have the support of the general staff, most of the governing class or even his own party. Tellingly, the new government that replaced him was headed by a rival Liberal baron, the Marquis of Alhucemas, and contained half of the previous ministers, though it is important to bear in mind that Romanones' resignation was due to King Alfonso XIII's withdrawal of confidence.<sup>66</sup>

Studies of Alfonso XIII reveal how since his coronation in May 1902, his quest for playing an active role in politics and his siding with his army officers in their conflicts with politicians helped undermine the foundations of the constitutional order.<sup>67</sup> Furthermore, in Restoration Spain, a narrow clique of crown, prime ministers, ministers of foreign affairs, and a few diplomats monopolized international relations. With Alfonso XIII, keen on assuming the role of privileged spokesperson with foreign ambassadors, international relations became almost his private domain.<sup>68</sup>

During the Great War, amidst a court dominated by his mother, the Austrian Archduchess Maria Christina of Habsburg, and his wife, the English Princess Victoria Eugénie of Battenberg, King Alfonso XIII was initially sympathetic towards the Allies.<sup>69</sup> His inclinations seemed to coincide with those of Romanones who wrote that

---

<sup>65</sup> *La Acción* (21 April 1917).

<sup>66</sup> ROMANONES, *Notas...*, pp. 384-386; Francisco J. ROMERO SALVADÓ: *España...*, pp. 104-105; Eduardo GONZÁLEZ CALLEJA and Paul AUBERT: *Nidos...*, p. 288; Grant to Hardinge (5, 7 May 1917), FO 371, 3033/96,587 and 92,539.

<sup>67</sup> An excellent and wide-ranging study of Alfonso XIII can be found in Javier MORENO LUZÓN (ed.): *Alfonso XIII. Un político en el trono*, Madrid, Marcial Pons, 2003.

<sup>68</sup> Antonio NIÑO: "Política de alianzas y compromisos coloniales para la regeneración internacional de España, 1898-1914", Javier TUSELL, Juan AVILÉS and Rosa PARDO (eds.): *La política exterior de España en el Siglo XX*, Madrid, Biblioteca New, 2000, p. 40.

<sup>69</sup> The king gave assurances to the French ambassador that permitted the withdrawal of troops from the border. He also offered collaboration in Morocco and the prompt delivery of a convoy of mules and horses. On the pro-Allied feeling of the monarch see Juan PANDO: *Un rey...*, pp. 100-102, 114-115; Javier TUSELL and Genoveva QUEIPO DE LLANO: *Alfonso XIII*, Madrid, Taurus, 2001, p. 285; Eduardo GONZÁLEZ CALLEJA and Paul AUBERT, *Nidos...*, pp. 268-273. Hardinge to Grey (31 August, 14 September 1914), FO 371, 2105/44,855 and 49,204.



"*Fatal Neutralities*" reflected the views of the sovereign.<sup>70</sup> Both of them perceived the war as a golden opportunity to gain international prestige and obtain territorial concessions. Nostalgic for a fading era of imperial splendour,<sup>71</sup> he cultivated good relations with the Entente in order to expand Spain's influence in North Africa and neighbouring Portugal, after the instability following the ousting of King Manuel II of Braganza and the proclamation of a republic in October 1910.<sup>72</sup> With intervention precluded by the precarious state of Spain's armed forces, he became enthused with the idea of championing a mediated peace. In July 1915, he established an *Oficina Pro-Cautivos* (Bureau for Prisoners) in the royal palace to gather information on missing citizens and soldiers, act on behalf of the population in occupied territories and perform other altruistic services such as prisoner' exchanges, repatriations, and concessions of pardons. Simultaneously, Spain took on the role of representing the interests of the belligerents in enemy countries.<sup>73</sup>

The harmony between monarch and prime minister soon began to break down. The enemies of the crown's (republicans and socialists) identification with the Entente, the Allies' constant snub of Spanish demands vis-à-vis German flattery (and crucially the close relations between Alfonso XIII and the military attaché Kalle) transformed the king's sympathies.<sup>74</sup> The arrival in Cartagena, in June 1916, of a

---

<sup>70</sup> ROMANONES: *Notas...*, p. 379.

<sup>71</sup> He had been crowned in 1902 in the aftermath of the colonial disaster of 1898.

<sup>72</sup> His interventionism in Portuguese affairs can be seen in RAH, *Natalio Rivas' Papers* (hereafter ANR), 11/8900 (June 1911) and 11/8901 (July 1911). See also Hipólito DE LA TORRE: *El imperio y el rey*, Mérida, Junta de Extremadura, 2002, pp. 79-88.

<sup>73</sup> The bureau, under the guidance of the king's private secretary, Emilio María de Torres, employed a staff of 52 people. They received over 20,000 letters a month. By the end of the war, it had spent over one million pesetas and achieved the commutation of 50 death sentences, 5,000 repatriations, tackled 25,000 enquiries from occupied territories and investigated the whereabouts of over 250,000 missing persons or war prisoners. The bureau intervened in nearly 325,000 cases. Vast records of the deeds performed by the *Oficina Pro-Cautivos* are kept in AGPR. For instance, a detailed break-down of expenses incurred in correspondence between July 1915 and February 1921 is in AGPR, 12.788/1; list of Spanish diplomatic representation on behalf of different belligerent states in enemy's capitals (Spain represented Germany in Portugal and Rumania; Austro-Hungary in Italy and Portugal; France in Germany, the Ottoman Empire, Persia and occupied Belgium; Russia in Germany, Austro-Hungary and occupied Belgium; and Great Britain in Austro-Hungary and Bulgaria) in AGPR, 12,112/6; letters of particulars thanking the Spanish monarch in AGPR, 15.624/17; and Don Alfonso being described as an angel of mercy by the US ambassador in AGPR, 15.624/21. For a summary of the bureau's deeds see Juan PANDO: *Un Rey...*, pp. 21-29.

<sup>74</sup> The king's complains about the "Allies' ingratitude" can be seen in Hardinge to Grey (15 March 1915), FO 371, 2470/29,500; and the king's meeting with the Bishop of Southwark (5 October 1915), FO 371, 2472/144,697. We cannot agree with the thesis of Ron M. CARDEN (*German...*, p. 6) that Alfonso XIII was

German submarine (U-35), responsible for numerous attacks in the Mediterranean, illustrated the monarch's changing attitude. The U-35's officers, who were feted as heroes by the local authorities, were the bearers of the Kaiser's personal message of gratitude to the Spanish sovereign for the excellent treatment received by his troops in Spanish Guinea. In fact, the initiative had begun with Alfonso XIII who in February had told Kalle that such a deed would cause a great impression upon public opinion and would leave Romanones speechless. After the avalanche of protests by the western powers, aware that the U-35 had passed on instructions to the crews of several German ships sheltered in Cartagena and even collected some sailors and weapons to carry out new operations, the government decreed that any future submarine arriving in a Spanish harbour would be interned unless due to major technical failure or bad weather.<sup>75</sup>

The reaction towards Germany's peace offers in December 1916 intensified the animosity between Romanones and the monarch. Encouraged by the Kaiser, Alfonso XIII believed that his moment of glory had finally arrived. His journey to Vienna to attend the funeral of the Austrian Emperor Franz Joseph provided him with the opportunity to meet the leaders of the Central Powers and then on his return home to undertake negotiations with the Allies in Paris.<sup>76</sup> The latter's rejection shocked him but even worse was Romanones' opposition to his trip and even to his wearing Austrian uniform during the private ceremony held in memory of Franz Joseph in Madrid.<sup>77</sup>

---

always favourable to the Allies but shrewdly manipulated the Germans into believing he supported their cause. Tellingly, Carden contradicts himself later by recognizing that all evidence reveals the monarch's pro-German stance (p. 159). Anne ROSENBUSCH (*Spanish-German...*, pp. 167-172) stresses the king's close relations with Kalle: The military attaché had convinced Berlin to please the Spanish sovereign by removing the statue erected in Brussels of Francisco Ferrer Guardia, the anarchist pedagogue shot in 1909. More shocking are the revelations that Alfonso XIII was informed of and supported Germany's campaign of destabilization in Morocco (pp. 226-227).

<sup>75</sup> Ron M. CARDEN, *German...*, pp. 111-113; Eduardo GONZÁLEZ CALLEJA and Paul AUBERT, *Nidos...*, pp. 276-282. French complains are in León y Castillo to Romanones (17 July 1916), ACR, II I A; and those from Britain can be found in (1 July 1916), AGPR, 16,231/2. The general bewilderment caused by the submarine was graphically expressed by "the U-35's Mission", *El Imparcial*, 24 June 1916.

<sup>76</sup> Letter from the Kaiser hailing Alfonso XIII as Europe's peacemaker (18 December 1916), AGPR, 12,911/22. Hardinge to Balfour (14 December 1916, FO 371, 2762/256,871.

<sup>77</sup> Romanones to Calbetón (26 December 1916), ACR, II I A.

In April 1917, the king sealed his prime minister's fate. The rupture with Germany shattered his dream of being the arbiter of peace. But, above all, Tsar Nicholas II's downfall unleashed panic in the royal palace as well as enthusiasm amongst his pro-Allied enemies who now could convincingly argue that the war was a clash between democracy and autocratic monarchies. Indeed, one month earlier, on 27 March, the UGT and the CNT, euphoric after the Russian events, had agreed to a manifesto indicating the need to launch a revolutionary general strike to oust the oligarchic regime presiding over Spain's social misery.<sup>78</sup> Editorials in *El Socialista* stressed that Spain should follow Russia's lead, liquidate its decadent monarchy, and join the Allies.<sup>79</sup> Simultaneously, to Alfonso XIII's horror, the Entente seemed to have soon forgotten the Tsar's fate and quickly recognized the new provisional government in Russia.

### **Between War and Revolution**

Apart from another critical moment at the end of the conflict, the neutrality issue gradually lost importance before the worsening domestic situation. In his pioneering work, Juan Antonio Lacomba suggests the crisis of 1917 in Spain consisted of three different phases: a praetorian insurrection in June led by the *Juntas Militares de Defensa*; a bourgeois revolution in July embodied by the establishment of an assembly of republican, Catalan regionalists and socialist parliamentarians with the object of initiating a thorough constitutional reform; and a proletarian revolution in August that was crushed by the army. Although accurate in chronological terms, such a thesis relies excessively on socio-economic determinism and overshadows the complexity of a process that transcended that historical framework. Furthermore, it overlooks the extent to which the origins and outcome of the crisis were closely linked to the international context and ignores the existence of a parallel phase of governmental reaction wherein neutrality itself was effectively exploited by the regime.<sup>80</sup>

---

<sup>78</sup> "The Proletariat to the Nation", *El Socialista*, 28 March 1917.

<sup>79</sup> "Against the German Spirit", *El Socialista*, 17-24 March 1917.

<sup>80</sup> Francisco J. ROMERO SALVADÓ: "La crisis revolucionaria española de 1917: una apuesta temeraria", Francisco J. ROMERO SALVADÓ and Angel SMITH (eds.), *La agonía...*, pp. 57-84.

Romanones' initiatives after his downfall and the monarch's subsequent reaction lit the fuse. Firstly, the prime minister's resignation note constituted a subtle attack on the crown. He claimed he had to leave office due to the lack of support from his party and the general public. And yet, it was evident that in Restoration Spain the king, and not public opinion, determined the fate of cabinets. A leading republican newspaper commented that the note was worthy of a good statesman but not of a palace lackey.<sup>81</sup> Secondly, on 27 May, Romanones helped finance a mass pro-Allied gathering of nearly 25,000 people. There, republicans and intellectuals, such as Miguel de Unamuno, stressed that neutrality was a shameful surrender of national dignity and vented their anger against Alfonso XIII, described as the chief of the German cause in Spain, who soon would end like his cousin Nicholas II.<sup>82</sup>

Terrified by the events in Russia and the situation in Spain, a frantic king ordered the war minister, General Manuel Aguilera, to dissolve the *Juntas*.<sup>83</sup> He drew an erroneous parallel between the Spanish officers and their Tsarist counterparts who had just advised their sovereign to abdicate. His decision triggered a revolutionary process. On 1 June, the *Juntas'* defiance culminated in an ultimatum: the government was given 12 hours to free their leaders who had been arrested after refusing to obey orders to disband their unions; to offer guarantees of no future reprisals; and to recognize their official statutes. Otherwise they would take matters in their own hands.<sup>84</sup>

The Alhucemas cabinet resigned after barely two months in office. Amidst the general disappointment, the king offered power to Eduardo Dato following the traditional rotation of the two dynastic parties as if these were normal times. A mainstream Madrid newspaper published an editorial entitled: "The Revolution has begun."<sup>85</sup> However, faced with the euphoria of the regime's enemies, and spurred by

---

<sup>81</sup> "Spain's Pro-German Neutrality", *El País*, 21 April 1917.

<sup>82</sup> "A Statement in favour of the Allies and the Revolution", *El País*, 28 May 1917. The previous month (29 April) the very same bullring had been the site of a speech by Antonio Maura on behalf of neutrality. His followers were overwhelmingly supporters of Germany. The count's role is analysed in Javier MORENO LUZÓN: *Romanones...*, p. 339. See also, Francisco J. ROMERO SALVADO: *España...*, pp. 108-110.

<sup>83</sup> ROMANONES, *Notas...*, pp. 413-414.

<sup>84</sup> Benito MÁRQUEZ and José María CAPÓ: *Las juntas militares de defensa*, La Habana, Porvenir, 1923, pp. 178-179; Carolyn P. BOYD: *Praetorian...*, pp. 61-66.

<sup>85</sup> *El Heraldo de Madrid*, 6 June 1917.

the praetorian rebellion, Dato proved more cunning than many had expected and took a reckless gamble. He hoped to lure the proletariat into carrying out its threat of a general strike. Confronted with the spectre of revolution, the scared middle classes would stop supporting any reformist schemes, the army would quell the disturbances, and the government could then claim to be the guarantor of law and order and the saviour of neutrality.<sup>86</sup> In order to succeed, the Dato cabinet endorsed a campaign of deceit and manipulation of public opinion whereby its enemies were accused of being financed by foreign gold in order to launch a revolution, proclaim the republic, and enter the war on the side of the Allies.<sup>87</sup>

In fact, the western powers never planned to topple the Spanish monarchy. However, republican and socialist pro-Allied rhetoric seemed to give authenticity to the idea. Alfonso XIII was fully convinced.<sup>88</sup> And ironically, while the Entente, which was reliant on the regular supply of Spain's mineral resources for its war effort, wished for political stability and averted any close identification with its Spanish left-wing supporters, Germany, the beacon of monarchist Spain, promoted social agitation and industrial unrest. According to French intelligence services, Germany sought to harm the Anglo-French interests in countries such as Russia and Spain in concert with close conservative groups or by fostering revolutionary movements.<sup>89</sup>

The Russian events facilitated the task of fitting the Entente into the role of promoters of the revolution. The pro-German press spread ludicrous rumours about British gold financing an insurrection against the monarchy. They even accused the very conservative British ambassador, Arthur Hardinge, of pulling the strings of a subversive plot as his colleague George Buchanan had done in Petrograd.<sup>90</sup> The case of Greece where Anglo-French pressures had ensured the fall of the pro-German King

---

<sup>86</sup> Francisco J. ROMERO SALVADÓ: "La crisis...", p. 77.

<sup>87</sup> Dato even commented in public that the workers' leaders were swimming in gold and drinking French champagne. Gabriel to Antonio Maura (7 July 1917), Fundación Antonio Maura, *Archivo de Antonio Maura* (AAM), 362/2. Some authors contend that Dato was merely fighting for the survival for the regime and therefore the end justified the means: Gerald MEAKER, *The Revolutionary...*, p. 83; Carlos SECO SERRANO, *La España de Alfonso XIII*, Madrid, Espasa Calpe, p. 409.

<sup>88</sup> Francisco J. ROMERO SALVADÓ, *España...*, pp. 155-157; Eduardo GONZÁLEZ CALLEJA and Paul AUBERT, *Nidos...*, pp. 294-298. Hardinge's report (24 September 1917), FO 185, 1346/469.

<sup>89</sup> Cited in Víctor MORALEZ LEZCANO: *León y Castillo, embajador (1887-1918)*, Las Palmas, Cabildo de Gran Canaria, 1998, p. 185.

<sup>90</sup> *El Día*, 28 May 1917; *La Acción*, 30 May 1917.

Constantine I, who was married to a sister of the Kaiser, seemed to bear out that thesis.<sup>91</sup> An overwhelmed Hardinge wrote to Alfonso XIII emphatically denying any sort of contact with revolutionaries “of the Lenin type, well known for their sympathies for Germany”.<sup>92</sup> The British ambassador also published (under the by-line of “An Allied Diplomat”) an article entitled “Spain and the Allied Interests” in which he argued that his side, containing several monarchies, wanted a strong Spain and not one torn apart by civil strife, which would threaten the precious supply of minerals and other goods vital for its war effort.<sup>93</sup> Hardinge even offered Dato his services to discover the truth behind the rumours and due to his insistence the British cabinet declared twice in the House of Commons its utter opposition to Spain’s forced entry into the war.<sup>94</sup>

Initially, the government’s plan proved successful: it took advantage of the outbreak of a violent railway dispute in Valencia to entice the labour movement to launch the revolutionary strike. In fact, the UGT first threatened with endorsing a solidarity strike of the whole sector on 10 August. Nevertheless, it sought until the last moment a compromise, but all its attempts met with the company’s intransigence; an attitude that was encouraged by the government. In short, the UGT was given a stark choice: accept utter defeat or go along with the strike announced for 10 August. Finally, on 13 August, the socialists staged a revolutionary strike that was brutally crushed by the army.<sup>95</sup> Promises of economic improvements together with the rumours of foreign gold behind the disturbances persuaded the officers that it was better to shoot fellow workers in Spain than to dig trenches in France.<sup>96</sup> However, the government’s victory was short-lived and its strategy helped undermine the

---

<sup>91</sup>A former prime minister, Eleftherios Venizelos, known for his interventionist policy in favour of the Entente, seized power. Greece entered the war in July 1917.

<sup>92</sup> Hardinge to Emilio de las Torres (4 July 1917), AGPR, 15,982/25.

<sup>93</sup> *La Época*, 4 June 1917.

<sup>94</sup> Hardinge to Balfour (6 June 1917), FO 185, 1344/268; Balfour to Hardinge (19 July 1917), FO 371, 3034/144,713. Arthur HARDINGE: *A Diplomatist in Europe*, London, Jonathan Cape, 1927, pp. 258-259.

<sup>95</sup> Juan Antonio LACOMBA: *La crisis...*, pp. 237-284.

<sup>96</sup> “Tricksters and those Tricked”, *La Época* (19 August 1917): it claimed that the strike committee leaders had been caught in a luxury apartment and in possession of millions in pesetas and foreign money. Unlike the old times, when revolutionaries led from the barricades, now they hid under beds while the deceived workers were sent to face the music. More on governmental slanders in Hardinge to Balfour (24, 31 August 1917), FO 185, 1346/433 and FO 371, 3034/175,803.

foundations of the constitutional order. Aware that they had been manipulated to suppress a revolt that the Dato cabinet had itself provoked, on 26 October, the army corps approved a message that was submitted to the king demanding the removal of the existing administration. In return, the officers guaranteed the dissolution (by force, if necessary) of any new parliament that could represent a challenge to the dynasty.<sup>97</sup>

With both dynastic parties utterly fragmented and ousted from office by the military in the last few months, the *turno pacífico* (peaceful rotation) between Conservatives and Liberals was shattered. The power vacuum lasted a record eight days until the formation of a monarchist coalition that was presided over by Alhucemas and comprised members of diverse dynastic factions and included, for the first, time, two Catalan regionalists. Tellingly, the *Juntas* were also directly represented by Juan de la Cierva, leader of a small group on the right of the Conservative Party, as war minister.<sup>98</sup>

### Neutrality's Agony

During the last year of the war, the impact of the Bolshevik triumph and the socio-economic dislocation brought about the breakdown of the belligerent countries' internal fronts. The Central Powers, although seemingly benefitting from the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk in March 1918 that left Russia out of the war, collapsed in autumn. The Allies managed to withstand the last German spring offensive and achieve victory largely due to the invaluable material and ideological support provided by the entry of the United States in the war.

In March 1918, besieged by food riots, strikes and the ever-pending threat of praetorian intervention, the Alhucemas cabinet gave way to a national government presided over by Antonio Maura, which included the main barons of all the dynastic factions – including Dato (Foreign Affairs), Alhucemas (Home Office), Alba (Education) and Romanones (Justice) – and the Lliga's leader, Francesc Cambó (Public Works).<sup>99</sup> Even though its *raison d'être* was the grave domestic situation, the

---

<sup>97</sup> Benito MÁRQUEZ and José María CAPÓ: *Las juntas...*, pp. 216-223.

<sup>98</sup> Juan Antonio LACOMBA: *La crisis...*, pp. 304-318.

<sup>99</sup> With the country undergoing an all-out strike of civil servants from the postal and telegraph services, rumours circulated that Cierva was planning a coup sustained by the *Juntas*. See Benito MÁRQUEZ and José María CAPÓ: *Las juntas...*, pp. 104-105; Hardinge to Balfour (6 April 1918), FO 371, 3372/60,969. ROMANONES (*Notas...*, pp. 421-422) claims that he persuaded the king to gather in the royal palace all

pompously named Cabinet of Titans was dragged into the international question. By the time of the armistice, Spain's neutrality had been preserved but its status had been clearly devalued.

Throughout 1918, the increasingly better-coordinated Allied intelligence services began to win their particular battle in Spain, as several German spy networks were exposed.<sup>100</sup> Even the direct collusion between the German Embassy and anarchist groups in Madrid was revealed.<sup>101</sup> Much larger was the organization based in the Catalan capital led by the enigmatic Baron Rolland, a Turkish national whose real name was Isaac Ezraty. His payroll included a former secretary of the CNT, Francisco Roldán, and the chief of police, Manuel Bravo Portillo, whose activities ranged from providing information on the departure of vessels to facilitate submarine operations, to sabotaging factories working for the Allies and even engaging in assassination attempts against factory owners.<sup>102</sup> When questioned by the king about the truth of the news, Kalle had to admit that it was correct in regards to Barcelona. But there had never been any plan to damage Spain's national interests.<sup>103</sup>

Faced with the avalanche of revelations, the government response was baffling. On 4 July, the parliament surreptitiously introduced a Law of Espionage. Henceforth, the penalty for collaboration with foreign agents could lead to imprisonment or a fine ranging from 500 to 20,000 pesetas. But the publication or circulation of any news contrary to the security or neutrality of the nation or harmful to a foreign power, chief of a foreign state or diplomatic representative, could lead to imprisonment or a fine ranging from 500 to 100,000 pesetas. In brief, it punished less the spy than the one who exposed him. Given the timing of the law, and despite

---

the monarchist leaders. There, he threatened them with his abdication if they could not be prepared to collaborate in a government of national unity.

<sup>100</sup> Fernando GARCÍA SANZ: *España...*, p. 74.

<sup>101</sup> "Proof of German Espionage", *El Sol*, 4-7 March 1918; "German Terrorism in Spain", *España*, 152, 7 March 1918; Hardinge to Balfour (5, 7, 14 March 1918), FO 371, 3373/44,846, 46,712 and 54,288.

<sup>102</sup> "German Espionage in Barcelona", *Solidaridad Obrera*, 9-12 June 1918; "The Portillo Affair", ACR, 16; Dispatch from the British Consul in Barcelona (5 July 1918), FO 371, 3375/118,036; British Intelligence Report (6 July 1918), FO 371, 3372/118,836.

<sup>103</sup> (3 February 1918), AGPR, 15,983/1.



Romanones' assurances to the Allies, it was perceived as a gag order for the press aimed at avoiding an embarrassing situation with Germany.<sup>104</sup>

Finally, the escalation of submarine attacks on Spanish vessels appeared to end the government's passivity. Like the sinking of the *San Fulgencio* in April of the previous year, the decisive moment this time was the torpedoing of the steamer *Ramón de Larriñaga*, travelling from New York with a vital cargo of oil, and was just about to enter Spanish waters on 13 July. Eight members of the crew died. Maura confided to Dato that such shocking brutality had surpassed the limits of his patience. The country demanded a stern sign of resolution without delay. Maura also told his son Gabriel that Spain's dignity was at stake.<sup>105</sup> Finally, after long deliberations, the cabinet agreed on 10 August to send a note of protest to Germany. It amounted to a mild-mannered ultimatum: Spain stressed its commitment to neutrality but also warned that effective means for ensuring the maintenance of its maritime trade and protecting the lives of its sailors needed to be adopted. Consequently, in the event of any fresh torpedoing, the tonnage sunk would be replaced by a similar amount obtained from German or Austrian ships lying in Spanish ports.<sup>106</sup> The ministers were dumbfounded when Germany replied that the implementation of such a measure would equate to *casus belli* and in the space of 10 days two other Spanish ships were sunk.<sup>107</sup> The choice was stark: to carry out the ultimatum and seize tonnage was to risk war while the alternative was a humiliating retreat.

Neutrality ultimately prevailed due to a combination of facts. Fearing being dragged into a conflict the government dreaded, Dato explored the attitude of the Allies. With victory within their sight, the latter had no interest in offering any incentives to Spain to enter the war in its final moments and therefore merely stated that it was up to her to take the necessary measures to safeguard her dignity.<sup>108</sup> Also crucially, neither the monarch nor the armed forces were prepared to abandon

---

<sup>104</sup> "German Ruse", *El País*, 4 July 1918.

<sup>105</sup> Maura to Dato (28 July 1918), AED, prime ministers, no. 365. Maura to his son Gabriel (2 August 1918), Gabriel MAURA and Melchor FERNÁNDEZ ALMAGRO: *Por qué...*, p. 314.

<sup>106</sup> Fernando SOLDEVILLA: *El año político de 1918*, Madrid, Julio Cosano, 1919, pp. 226-228.

<sup>107</sup> Maura to Dato (18 August 1918), AAM, 272/1.

<sup>108</sup> Hardinge to Balfour (23 August, 2 September 1918), FO 371, 3374/145,426 and 150,374; Balfour to Vaughan (18-19, 24 September 1918), FO 371, 3374/157,329, 158,384 and 161,163.

neutrality as was made clear in the council of ministers of 31 August by Admiral Augusto Miranda, the Navy minister. That day, Natalio Rivas wrote in his diary: “the king is prepared to sack all his ministers in order to defend neutrality”. A few days later, Dato confirmed to Maura that the monarch had said that under no circumstances was he prepared to permit a departure from strict neutrality.<sup>109</sup> The ambassador in Berlin, the openly pro-German Polo de Bernabé, declined all responsibility and submitted his resignation, which, tellingly, was not accepted by the king.<sup>110</sup> With little room to manoeuvre, the only choice was to find a formula which could permit everybody to save face, something facilitated by the conciliatory tone of the Spanish government and the negotiating attitude of the German Foreign Office in light of the rapidly crumbling war effort. On 13 October, Ratibor confirmed the loan of 6 ships to supply those sunk since the drafting of the note. The Maura administration hastened to confirm that the deal was the product of a friendly agreement.<sup>111</sup> According to a leading notable of the Conservative Party, Manuel Burgos y Mazo, the general impression vis-à-vis the agreement was deplorable and caused dismay in the western capitals.<sup>112</sup>

The preservation of neutrality allowed Spain to avoid human bloodletting and to conserve all her territories (including her islands and few remaining colonies). Nevertheless, the same neutrality that was so logic in the summer of 1914, four years later seemed to reflect Spain’s dismaying impotence rather than her honourable. The Central Powers had committed 128 attacks against Spanish vessels, destroyed 20 per cent of the merchant fleet (81 ships), caused the death of over 100 sailors, gravely threatened trade and communications, and, in brief, showed constant contempt for Spain through subversive activities. Not only did the coveted dream of presiding over

---

<sup>109</sup> (31 August 1918), ANR, 11-8906; Dato to Maura (7 September 1918), AAM, 272/1. More on the king’s veto in ROMANONES, *Notas...*, pp. 423-424; and the British ambassador in Paris to Balfour (9 September 1918), FO 371, 3374/153,920.

<sup>110</sup> Polo to Dato (31 August 1918) and Dato to Polo (6 September 1918), AED, diplomats, nos. 29-30; Dato to Polo (28 September 1918) AAM, 272/1.

<sup>111</sup> Maura to Dato (5, 9 September, 3 October 1918), AED, prime ministers, nos. 376, 378, 382; Dato to Ratibor (8 September 1918), AAM, 272/1; Maura to Dato (29 September 1918), AAM, 255/1; Maura’s private notes (October 1918), AAM, 256/6; Maura to Ratibor (10, 14 October 1918), Ratibor to Maura (13 October 1918), AAM, 256/10. An analysis of the events in Eduardo GONZÁLEZ CALLEJA and Paul AUBERT, *Nidos...*, pp. 302-310.

<sup>112</sup> Manuel BURGOS AND MAZO: *El verano de 1919 en Gobernación*, Cuenca, Tipos, 1921, p. 50.

mediation never materialize, but also Spain could not leave behind her marginal status in the international arena. In December 1918, Romanones returned to office on the eve of the Peace Conference but as he had feared in "*Fatal Neutralities*", there would be no gratitude for the neutrals in the new world order. One of the few satisfactions he obtained was to accomplish the expulsion of Ratibor, his previous nemesis, together with his close collaborators, on 9 January 1919.<sup>113</sup> The count travelled to Paris where he held talks with the North American president, Woodrow Wilson, and the French prime minister, Georges Clemenceau. But there was no formal invitation to attend the peace proceedings and the Austro-German tonnage anchored in Spanish ports was seized by the Allies who, only after months of arduous negotiations, permitted Spain to formally acquire the six ceded ships, which were symbolically re-baptized with the name *España* I to VI.

Isolated from the winning bloc, Spain would have to face the nightmare of the war in Morocco without help from France, a country that could not easily forget the pro-German attitudes of the Spanish authorities in that colony. In the domestic realm, the Great War constituted a turning-point in the transition from elite to mass politics, and consequently, accelerated the crisis of traditional liberalism. As in the rest of Europe, Restoration Spain was rocked in the post-war years by a revolutionary wave propelled by widespread popular discontent, economic upheaval, and the Bolshevik example. However, as the outcome of 1917 had revealed, the real danger to the constitutional order was not revolution, but praetorian subversion.

---

<sup>113</sup> José Luis MARTÍNEZ SANZ, "El enfrentamiento...", pp. 422-424.